The tale of lost Raja-zamindars of Garden Reach Calcutta

Description of the Deb Biswas Zamindari Raj

Records from the early 16th century connect Badartala, Nadial, Rajabagan, Garden reach (Moochicollah) the old riverfront core of Garden Reach, and Matiyaburj (its old riverfront core) as being ruled by the Deb Biswas Raj family across their 4,500 – 4,789 bigha riverfront zamindari raj estate in present-day Kolkata. During this period, the family started the Durga Puja at the Badartala Rajbari in 1525, which grew into one of their most enduring traditions.Rajabagan ("raja's garden") derives its name from their Raj Bari, which was situated at 42 Garden Reach Road, Calcutta 700024.

Construction of the Mud Fort

The Matiya Burj, or mud fort, situated beside Bichali Ghat, was commissioned by Maharaja Pratapaditya Roy of Jessore and was likely constructed by the Deb Biswas rajas of that region. Its location within their zamindari estate suggests that the family must have permitted, or at least approved, its construction.

The fort was situated about 800 meters east of the Rajbari . The family was among the smaller rajas and zamindars associated with the Baro-Bhuyans and allied with Maharaja Pratapaditya Roy of Jessore against the Mughals, further establishing their regional influence.

The Rajbari was located at Rajabagan, Garden Reach, but it was called the Badartala Rajbari because the kachari bari, the administrative office and court complex was situated in Badartala, so the zamindari's legal and revenue-accounting functions were anchored there, even though the main residence stood further west along the riverfront. Even though they ruled Badartala, Nadial, Rajabagan, (Moochicollah—the old riverfront core of Garden Reach), and Matiyaburj (its old riverfront core), the family came to be known as the Badartala's Deb Biswas family, and the estate was also commonly referred to as the Badartala Zamindari Raj estate, even though it formally included many more places.

Forebears of Raja Ramjoy Deb Biswas and the Advent of English Learning in the Family

The forefathers of Raja Ramjoy Deb Biswas were likely among the first rulers of the Deb Biswas family to learn English around the mid-1690s, though their names have been lost to the pages of history, thereby adding a new dimension to the family's long tradition of scholarship, in which they were scholars of Sanskrit, possibly Persian, and perhaps some other languages, including European ones.

3. Raja Ramjoy Deb Biswas (b.1710s-1720s; d. 1800s-1810s)

He was one of the first clearly recorded Raja-zamindar of the Garden Reach region. His reign established the zamindari prominence of the family and continued the legacy of ruling, landholding, and learning that defined the family's character.

4. Raja Monmotonath Deb Biswas (b.1760s; d.1840s)
He was the son of Raja Ramjoy Deb Biswas. He was one of the Prominent Raja-zamindar of the family's zamindari heritage in Garden Reach region. He is remembered as a stable and influential figure of his time. With his ties to the high-ranking British officials of the East India Company, he strengthened his position.

5. Raja Badyanath Deb Biswas (b.1800s-1810s; d.1899)
He was the son of Raja Monmotonath Deb Biswas; ruled with authority for a considerable period and maintained ties with the British authorities, presiding over the estate during both its prosperity and decline.
Durga Puja Dacoity (Mid-19th Century):
During the Dashami night of Durga Puja, the Badartala Rajbari was attacked by dacoits arriving by boat. The mother of Raja Badyanath Deb Biswas surrendered the treasury keys on the condition that no family member would be harmed. The dacoits looted large quantities of gold and silver, yet the family remained unharmed.
After this tragic event, the family moved to 82/B Mansatala Lane,Khidirpur, Calcutta-23 (KAMALALAYA). The Badartala Rajbari estate was eventually sold to Kesoram Cotton Mills Limited in 1917, during Suresh Chandra's reign. Later excavations at the estate revealed eight ghara (pots) of gold. However, the British officials brought the treasure to the new residence, and since no ownership documents survived, it was surrendered to the British Government.

6. (Prince) Raja Suresh Chandra Deb Biswas (b.1865; d.1931)
Son of Maharaja Badyanath Deb Biswas, he began managing the zamindari in the 1890s and continued until 1917. During his reign, new zamindari wax seals, emblems, and stamps were created, bearing the 'SB' engraving, which stood for S. Biswas. This marked the beginning of what came to be known as the "S.B Generation," a lineage identity that continues to the present day.
A distinguished scholar, he studied in the U.K. in the late 1880s, completing an M.A. in English. In the 1890s, he authored Good English Grammar, an English-to-Bangla grammar and translation book.
He maintained a close friendship with Mr. Good, Mayor-in-Council of Calcutta, and held strong ties with high-ranking British Indian officials. He also maintained cordial relations with the British authorities as well as the British noble families, giving the family a place of respect in colonial Bengal. Suresh Chandra was also conferred the title of Prince by British elite society and honoured with six ribbons and a medal for his service, literary contribution and loyalty.

7. Subhod Chandra Biswas (b.1908; d.1982)
Elder son of (Prince) Raja Suresh Chandra Deb Biswas. Inherited the family's intellectual tradition. Authored "Glare in Gloom" (1962), a literary work that added prestige to the family's cultural legacy. His writings marked the final chapter of the family's transition from

zamindari power to intellectual and literary influence. This marked the end of the family's royalty, it now survives only as a story tale, with little or no documentation remaining.